

February 3, 2009

To: Chairman Kendall Van Dyk and Members of the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife And Parks
RE: House Bill 382 Families Afield initiative

From: **Charles G. Houk** - 3270 Lonesome Loop, Helena, Montana, Mail: POB 718, E. Helena, Mt 59635
Certified Montana Hunter's Safety Instructor since 1997. Identified as Instructor #21606
Taught 2 classes/year since 1997. Teaching approximately 500 Men, Women, Boys and Girls
Presently organizing eight teachers and two junior instructors for East Valley Middle School, East Helena, Montana, for classes this Spring in March.
Substitute Teacher in District #1, Helena since 1997 (High School and Middle School)
Minister: Crossroads Christian Church which supplies space for two Bow Hunter Classes each for the last two years.
Dean of Intermediate and Junior camps for many years at Kootenai Christian Camp, Lake Mary Ronan.
Conducted 5 Tipi Camps near Landusky, Montana

Mr. Chairman, May I hand out two documents for each member of the committee? One now and another at the end of my testimony.

The use of mentors working with children and firearms is very wise and I encourage it.

I **oppose** this bill for several reasons:

1. On the attached page, last paragraph, states" (From the Hunter's Safety Instructor's Policy Manual)
"This law was passed based upon experience and observation suggesting that on average, students under 12 years of age fail the training course much more frequently than older students. Many youngsters under 12 years of age are physically incapable of handling firearms safely and properly."

I concur with this observation. It is beyond me to even consider allowing a 6 year-old to fire a 30-30 rifle much less hunt with one. What I **can see** is that the mentor would be holding the firearm to his shoulder while the youth pulls the trigger.

2. NEW SECTION: Section 1. "...Regardless of age..."
Hunter's Education Instructors were invited to attend (-20 degrees out) a meeting at the FWP offices on Sixth Street, 12/13/2008. We were introduced to this act. It was stated that not only could under age youth qualify for a special certificate but also those over 12 ... even adults could qualify.

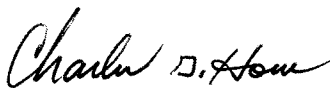
I see this as an attempt to circumnavigate the Hunter's Education Program. Montana's Hunter Education program is the best in the United States.

3. NEW SECTION: (2)(b) "An applicant may use an apprentice certificate to purchase hunting licenses for not more than 5 license years."

If Montana still requires 11 and 12 year olds to take Hunter's Safety then a 6 year old could purchase hunting licenses until that age. OR a 10 year old could qualify for an apprentice certificate and hunt without attending and passing a Hunter's Safety Class until he was 15 years old. I think not.

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, this is a very bad bill and I encourage you to not pass this legislation. I can only speak for myself but if Montana wants to lower the hunting age they can, but not without putting hunters young & old at great risk when untrained youngsters are in the field with powerful firearms.

Sincerely Yours,



Charles G. Houk

2. AGE OF STUDENTS

Policy: All youths, 11 through 17 years of age, wanting to purchase a hunting license are required by law to complete the certified course of instruction involving at least 12 hours of training and safe handling of firearms. The course also includes conservation, safety, and sportsmanship.

Any person regardless of age may enroll in the hunter education course. Only youth 11 years of age or older may be certified upon the successful completion of the course. Those youth under the age of 11 who successfully complete the course cannot be certified. Any person over the age of 11 may participate in the course and be certified upon successful completion of the course. Adults 18 years of age or older are encouraged to participate in the course and should not be denied or discouraged from completing the course. Many adults complete the course for their own education, or to satisfy other requirements, such as a concealed weapon permit.

Students who are 11 years of age or older and successfully complete the course are to receive their certificate. In the case of 11 years old, instructors should not hold the certificate until the student turns 12. It is the person and license agent's responsibility to verify the legal age when purchasing a hunting license. This statement is printed in red on the certificate.

Students who turn 12 years of age **prior** to September 15 of the license year and have successfully completed the hunter education course may apply for a Special Drawing license (June 1 deadline).

Justification: Federal regulations governing administration of the hunter education program prohibits discrimination and denial of certification based on age **unless** the state establishes a minimum age for the purchase of a hunting license. The State of Montana has established the minimum age for the purchase of big game hunting license to be 12 years of age.

This law was passed based upon experience and observation suggesting that on the average, students under 12 years of age fail the training course much more frequently than older students. Many youngsters under 12 years of age are physically incapable of handling firearms safely and properly. There are obviously exceptions. For this reason, the department has established the above policy to remain in compliance with federal regulations to further insure those youth eligible to hunt have received the hunter education training in a relatively short period of time before venturing into the field. The department feels that an individual receiving the training and being certified at the age of 8 years and having to wait four years before he or she can purchase a license is too much time between the training and the actual experience of hunting. Too much of the information would be forgotten during that time period.